

'Papyrus' an eloquent ode to life's many gritty moments

AN AMERICAN PAPYRUS by Steven David Justin Sills; *The Chestnut Hills Press Poetry Series*; 63 pages; \$6.95 paperback.

By Amy L. Wilson
Gazette Staff

Twenty-six poems make up this first published book by Steven Sills, 26, of Fayetteville. Sills' vision is often a dark one. He writes of the homeless, the abused, the forgotten people.

He also is intrigued with the mystical, the sensual/sexual, loss — as in losing those whom we hold dear, such as a spouse or lover — as well as *the lost*, such as someone who is autistic, who seems unreachable.

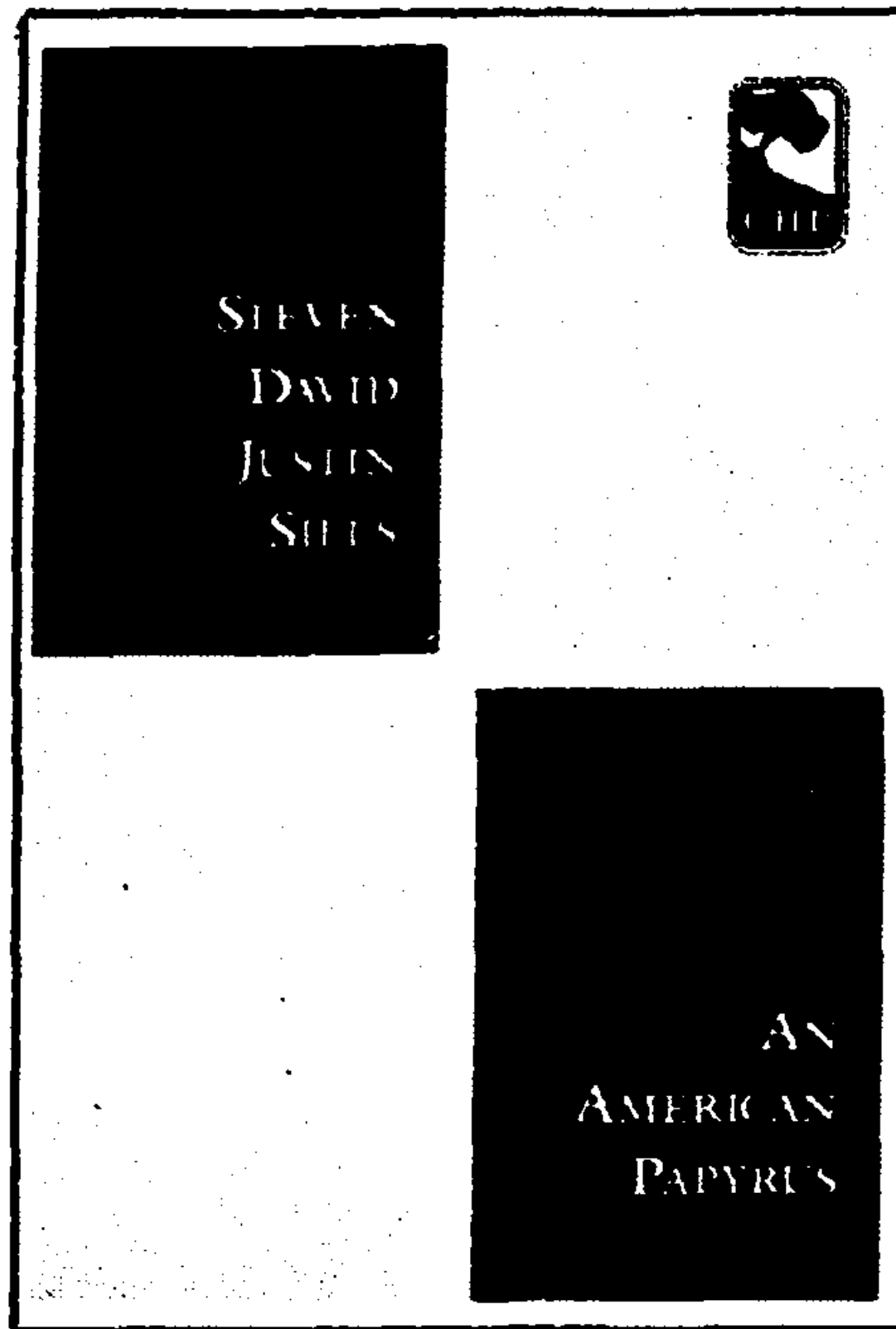
Sills' skillful use of the language to impart the telling moments of a life is his strength. He chooses his words carefully, employing a well-developed vocabulary. He is thoughtful about punctuation, where to break lines and when to make a new stanza.

He's obviously well-versed in "great" literature.

Sills' command of language helps to soften the blows of some of the seamier passages found in his poems.

Seamy may not be the best word to use. Perhaps gritty is a better word. Or just plain matter-of-fact and to the point, as in this descriptive passage from "Oracion A Traves De Gasshole," about the hopeless feelings of a respiratory therapy worker:

*With the last of the air drawing in,
Begins to fold its walls; and he
could imagine it
Like he could imagine, from
unexact memories,*



*The woman, last night
At the hospital, whom he began
to like —*

*Her body pulling cell by cell
Apart before he had a chance
To finish the rescue with the hose*

The book begins with "Post-Annulment 2," a poem with a poignant description of society's displaced — *As the sun blazes upon the terminal's/ Scraped concrete/ The shelved rows of the poor men* — and continues by describing a city scene through the eyes of a maintenance worker at the Hilton Hotel.

The protagonist's wife has left him and he is taking the bus to work that morning, his mind wandering as he looks for the key to why she is gone:

*He rings the bell.
The idea of her not home, and
legally annulled*

*From his life — ...
...makes him feel sick. He gets
down from the bus.*

*He goes to work. He suddenly
knows that he is not in love.*

As many poets will do, Sills could not leave this work alone. So a hybrid of this poem, "Post Annulment" ends the book. In it, he has kept many of the original lines and added parenthetical remarks to expand on his ideas.

It is in this context he allows himself to comment on religion: *Religion is a lie! Everything is a lie!* and on marriage: *Marriage, that sanctified legal rape, fosters/ the child-man to be a destined societal function/ As he grows up in the family unit.*

Not all the poems are so bleak and cynical in every passage, however, as is apparent in "The San Franciscan's Night Meditations": *The night is full of impulses/ To live and to run and seep heavily/ Into its dark robes of/ Silence and morbid rightness.*

People who do not feel comfortable examining in detail the darker side of life — the details that the average person overlooks because it just hurts or feels too strange to look — will not enjoy this book.

Serious writers of free verse, contemporary poetry and/or those who study it will not be disappointed.

Sills, a native of Missouri, is a recent graduate of Southwest Missouri State University in Springfield. He currently is working in Fayetteville.

Sills dedicated his book to Mike Burns, a poet and teacher at SMSU who helped him edit his work.